



**CITY OF BOULDER
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM**

MEETING DATE: July 22, 2014

AGENDA TITLE: Update on Public Art: Commencement of Community Dialogue

PRESENTERS:

Jane S. Brautigam, City Manager

David Farnan, Library & Arts Director

Matt Chasansky, Arts & Cultural Services Manager

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Library and Arts Department and the Office of Arts and Culture plans to implement a series of temporary, interactive public art projects over the next 12 to 18 months with existing funds designated for public art. The primary goals are to activate the Civic Area and other city neighborhoods, re-engage the community in a dialogue around public art and increase public input into the Community Cultural Plan.

In order to ensure that an emphasis is placed on public dialogue, a portion of the funds will be spent to “set the stage” for public art. Staff plans to bring in public speakers, conduct workshops, and convene public panels to discuss the role of public art in our community and how it has been used to activate other communities. A small portion of the funds will also be spent for marketing and advertising collateral to increase awareness of the arts, and what is happening in and around Boulder with regard to public art. Finally, efforts will be put in place to more significantly notify members of the community about how they can participate in the public meetings for the selection and approval components of the process.

Successfully executed, the goals of activating the Civic Area, increasing public feedback for the Community Cultural Plan, and generating more discussion about public art will be met. Ideally, this plan will allow the community to have some fun with public art and inspire people to ask – How can we do more of this?

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff requests council consideration of this matter and that Council provide feedback on the proposed plan to execute a series of temporary interactive public art projects to engage the community with a diverse array of public arts and solicit community dialogue.

COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENTS AND IMPACTS

- Economic – The funds for this project will be reinvested in the community as artists, both local and non-resident, hire fabricators, engineers, and other subcontractors to complete the work. What is more, the cultural activity that these projects generate may be an asset for the city and other partners to boost tourism objectives.
- Environmental – Whenever possible, artists will be encouraged to incorporate sustainable practices, or themes about environmental resiliency, into their proposals. This will enable the city to enhance Boulder’s brand as a center for advanced environmental action.
- Social – Public art is a social catalyst. As described, our intent is to generate interactive art that is fun. The artworks in this project will be sited around the city. In some cases these sites will be places that are not usually a forum for art, or in communities that are not usually the environment for cultural experiences.

OTHER IMPACTS

- Fiscal – There are no immediate fiscal impacts. Funds for public arts were already allocated in 2014.
- Staff time – This will not incur any additional staff time.

BOARD AND COMMISSION FEEDBACK

The Library Commission and the Arts Commission have each unanimously approved a plan for how to bring these temporary, interactive arts to fruition, and moved to show their “strong” support. A selection committee will be formed to review criteria and rank diverse types of artists into tiered categories. The final list will form a roster that includes resident and non-resident artists working in different media to bring temporary, interactive arts to the Civic Area and other neighborhoods in Boulder to create lively, engaging artworks that will inspire community dialogue. Staff will then select the best opportunities, given issues of budget, site, and the overall feasibility and potential for each artist’s concept before moving forward to contracting and design.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK

Public feedback would be obtained during the proposed community dialogue process and presented to Council at a later time in the process.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

For the past year, a lot of time, energy and thought went into planning for a permanent piece of public art to be constructed along with the renovation of the Main Library. That effort was the failed “YES!” campaign, and regardless of its merits as art, clearly the overall idea was inadequately vetted with the public. As a direct result, a vocal group of detractors expressed their displeasure with the proposed work of art, and exposed a misunderstanding of the funding source thinking that it could be spent on books or other improvements to the library. In addition, some members of the community objected to the notion that a sum of \$150K should be spent on public art. Others rejected a permanent piece that, in their opinions, negatively impacted the views from within the library.

At the same time that the *YES!* sculpture was being discussed by the community, another project funded by the city’s Office of Arts & Cultural Services was conceived and completed as a part of the Civic Area activation project. The temporary mural, “Bot Joy,” was successfully completed and has received positive public feedback and media coverage. These simultaneous projects elicited a strong dialogue about public art and engaged the community. Staff thinks commencing this dialogue will help inform an improved process for public art, activate the Civic Area and other neighborhoods, and help achieve a broad level of input for the Community Cultural Plan.

It is important to note that the funds for the *YES!* sculpture were never designated for any other uses than public art. It is also important to note that the funds were not specifically allocated for exclusive use by the library. The original source of the money was unexpended Boulder Arts Commission (BAC) grant funds and savings from a delay in filling the previously vacant arts manager position. The initial budgetary designation from the City of Boulder is as follows,

“2012 grant funding that was not awarded by the BAC to be allocated to the emerging public art program and applied to the cost of new public art to be located citywide”

At the May 14, 2014 joint Library Commission and Arts Commission meeting, both commissions were updated on the Civic Area Vision Plan and presented with the idea of how temporary public art projects could activate the Civic Area (including spaces adjacent to the main library) and other neighborhoods citywide. Staff drafted a plan for how the Library and Arts Department could partner with the Civic Area Planning Group, Parks and Recreation Department, and other city partners to best leverage public art funds for the installation of temporary, interactive public arts that will appeal to a diverse range of tastes and activate the civic area and other neighborhoods.

Selection criteria will stipulate temporary projects that generate community interest and conversations, with an emphasis on being interactive and fun for a broad swath of the community, including children and families. Similar projects in other cities have included tech based interactive exhibits, sound installations, and participatory pieces. Staff’s goal is to execute this plan in the course of the next 12 to 18 months, with some of the installations being used to leverage a greater amount of public feedback on the

Community Cultural Plan, as well as piloting different forms of interactive arts in neighborhoods throughout the city.

The overall intent is to engage the public in a broader discussion about the process and role of public art and to hear their thoughts on how it might positively impact the quality of life in their city. There are several further goals for this project including experimenting with the latest in public art practice as research for the Community Cultural Plan, reasserting Boulder as a positive environment for artists to work, fostering cultural tourism, and testing ways public art can have a robust impact on focused areas and neighborhoods throughout Boulder. Rather than expending a larger sum on any one particular permanent piece, staff will be able to experiment with multiple types of interactive pieces that appeal to a broad range of tastes, and gather feedback on what works for Boulder.